

Lights Out by Luddleston

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Summary:

The Atlas was quiet at night. After lights-out, anyone who wasn't an officer would be reprimanded for wandering about... but the lights in the situation room were on.

Shiro is overworked, Curtis tries to help.

Lights Out

Author's Note:

I have a document where I was gonna write a whole bunch of atlas shenanigans and post them as a bunch of chapters in one fic, but I keep not writing them, so I'm just posting this one all on its lonesome!

The Atlas was quiet at night. After lights-out, anyone who wasn't an officer would be reprimanded for wandering about, except perhaps Colleen, who was prone to making her way down to the labs late at night because she knew that one or more of her family members would be asleep slumped in front of a computer.

The lights in the situation room were on. It was still a bit dim in there, it always was, but Curtis could see the faint orange glow from under the closed door, so he opened it to poke his head again, assuming somebody had forgotten to turn off the giant screens again.

That wasn't quite the case.

The screens were shut off, the light coming from an overhead bulb, illuminating the bright white of Captain Shirogane's hair as he leaned over a screen, fingers swiping through what looked like mountains of data. Curtis felt a pang of sympathy as he recalled spending late nights poring over resource allocation spreadsheets when the Garrison was under fire.

"Captain?" he said, and the captain's head jerked up, eyes wide, like he was afraid of getting caught, like he didn't run the entire ship. It was endearing, the way he sort of acted like somebody else should have been in charge of him.

"Oh! Curtis," he said, setting down the datapad. "What brings you over here?" Like this was far at all from the bridge, or from the officers' quarters, like Curtis wasn't in here every third day for meetings.

"Nothing," he said, with a shrug, "lights were still on. Late night?"

Captain Shirogane rubbed the bridge of his nose, just above the scar, his eyes squeezing shut for just a minute. "Yeah," he said, the professionalism draining from his voice and weariness seeping in to take its place. "Going over weapons plans from Sam and Slav. Half of them are incomprehensible. Slav's half, of course."

Curtis had once seen Slav with three separate keyboards in front of him, typing on each one with a pair of his hands. No wonder the reports were impossible to understand. "You want some help with those?" he offered. "I might not be a weapons expert, but maybe I can... do something?"

"Can you read Altean numbers?" the captain asked. "Slav refuses to learn our numerical system."

"Uh... yes, I think. They're kind of like Roman numerals, aren't they?" He drew up a seat next to the captain and took up one of the slim, orange data pads, watching as the information loaded onto the screen.

"Yeah, if Roman numerals were invented by aliens." The weariness was replaced by exasperation at this point.

"Well, to be fair, Captain, Altean numerals were invented by aliens."

That got a smile out of him. "You've got a point. And it's just 'Shiro,' Curtis, past two in the morning, titles don't mean anything anymore."

The captain—*Shiro*— went back to running through his reports, a little line appearing between his eyebrows as he frowned at the screen. He must've still been in the midst of Slav's half. Curtis had Commander Holt's reports, which were much clearer, and easy to take notes on, so he moved through them rather quickly, thinking that Shiro must've been trying to be nice, giving him the easier task.

"Honestly, sir, I don't know how you keep this all straight," Curtis said, squinting at a particular paragraph that was too jargon-heavy for him to entirely understand what it meant.

"I'm not very well-known for keeping things straight," Shiro replied, a dimple appearing at the corner of his mouth.

"You seem pretty organized to me." Curtis turned his confused stare to Shiro, trying to figure out the point of the joke he seemed to be saying, because Shiro was more on top of it than any commanding officer he'd ever had.

"Oh! Sorry. That was a joke about my sexuality, not my organizational skills." Shiro's eyes flickered down, focusing on Slav's notes again. He scrolled through them with his organic hand, too fast to actually be reading them, the robotic arm lying inert on the table next to him. "Sorry," he said again, "my sense of humor's not great normally, much less this late... early? Is it late or early at this point?"

"I'm not sure? Early in the morning, late at night?" Curtis suggested. "Anyway, your sense of humor's fine."

"You sure? Last time I tried to make a joke in front of Iverson, he completely missed it and started lecturing me like I was a cadet again instead."

Iverson seemed to have two modes: lecturing, or gruff but fond. "Well, I'm not surprised he didn't see it," Curtis said, tapping one finger absently on the side of his datapad, "he's half-blind, after all."

That got a real laugh out of Shiro, bright and sharp, like it'd been startled out of him, the corners of his eyes crinkling up attractively. "That's a good one," he said. He sighed, then, dropping the datapad onto the table and leaning back in his chair, his robotic arm levitating up to balance his weight as he shifted to face Curtis. "I'm not sure if Slav's impossible to understand or I'm just so tired I'm getting stupid," he admitted. "Let's go to bed."

"I'm sorry, are you propositioning me, Captain?" Curtis asked, unable to keep a straight face, grinning all the way through it.

Shiro went bright red and stood up so quickly he almost fell over, stammering his way through, "I—no—I wouldn't—sorry, Curtis—" and

Curtis had to stand, too, laying a hand on Shiro's forearm to get him to stop.

"It's okay," he said, "I was joking."

Shiro let out a visible sigh of relief. "Good," he said, "don't want you getting the wrong idea about me. I'm a gentleman, I don't ask that without taking a guy out to dinner, first."

"Oh, I figured," Curtis said, heading for the door with Shiro at his heels, "you give off that kind of vibe, you know."

Outside the situation room was where they'd part. Curtis's room was to the left with the rest of the officers' quarters, Shiro's was to the right. That's why he was surprised when he only got out half a 'goodnight' before Shiro grabbed his elbow, stopping him from stepping further away.

"Hey, Curtis," he said.

"Hey, Shiro." Even after Shiro's dismissal of titles earlier, it was the first time Curtis had called him anything other than 'Captain' or 'Sir.'

"Want to go out for dinner sometime?" There was a hopeful smile on his face, charming, boyish, the kind that actually made him look his age despite the white hair and the years of war making him look so much older.

"Yeah," he said, because he had to take the chance, even if it was just Shiro's 3 A.M. delirium that was pushing him to ask Curtis on a date—this was a date, right? Definitely a date. "That sounds nice."

Author's Note:

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